

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1964, the Job Corps program has played a central part in federal efforts to provide employment assistance to disadvantaged youths. Job Corps provides a wide range of education, vocational training, and support services in a predominantly residential setting to economically disadvantaged youths between the ages of 16 and 24. Currently, 111 Job Corps centers operate nationwide, serving more than 60,000 new enrollees each year, at an annual cost of more than one billion dollars. Each Job Corps center provides training in a range of vocational trades, typically including business and clerical occupations, health occupations, food-service occupations, and several construction trades.

Much of the vocational training at Job Corps involves hands-on work. Students practice vocational skills by performing tasks they would do on the job. Some of these activities, such as laying a brick wall in the classroom and then knocking it down, produce no end product, their purpose is only to teach students skills. Other activities produce tangible products or services that someone uses. While the primary purpose of these projects is to train the students, the products and services the students produce are valuable by-products of their training. This report presents estimates of the value of these products or services.

The National Job Corps Study, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), was designed to provide a rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of Job Corps.¹ It involves a study of the impact of the program on outcomes that include employment and earnings, use of educational and training programs, dependence on welfare and other assistance programs, family formation and childbearing,

¹This study is being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) and its subcontractors, Battelle Human Affairs Research Centers and Decision Information Resources, Inc.

and antisocial behavior. It also involves a benefit-cost analysis and an analysis of how the Job Corps program model is implemented in practice.

The benefit-cost analysis will assess whether the benefits of Job Corps justify the substantial investment of public resources in the program. It will provide a framework for evaluating the many potential benefits and costs of the program, including those that cannot be measured in dollars. Expected benefits of Job Corps include the increased employment and earnings of youth who have participated in Job Corps, reduced criminal activity, and reduced use of other services and programs. The most important costs of Job Corps are the program operating costs and the earnings foregone while the student attends Job Corps.

The value of products or services students produce while at Job Corps are additional “benefits” of Job Corps. To assure a comprehensive assessment of benefits and costs, the value of these products or services will be included in estimating the benefits of the program. Including this output in the benefit-cost analysis ensures that work performed by Job Corps students is valued on the same basis as work performed by youth not enrolled in Job Corps. The training value of the activities will be captured in the benefit-cost analysis in estimates of the student’s earnings after they leave Job Corps.

The next section describes the types of projects conducted by Job Corps students during vocational training. The chapter ends with a description of the organization of the report.

A. PROJECTS CONDUCTED BY STUDENTS DURING VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Job Corps centers provide two main types of training projects: Vocational Skills Training (VST) projects and Work Experience (WE) projects.

1. VST Projects

Job Corps defines VST projects as “activities that provide vocational instruction to students through actual construction or improvement of facilities or result in a finished product” (DOL 1993, PRH-4, page 11). VST projects play a central role in training students in the construction trades. The most common VST project involves work on center facilities. Students participate in remodeling and construction work at the center, including remodeling of classrooms and dormitories. Some remodeling projects are long-term and involve many students, while other VST projects are short-term and involve fewer students. Students may remodel a dormitory or build a book case as VST projects. Students may be involved in the repair and maintenance of the center, including such tasks as painting and landscaping. Some VST projects--referred to as community projects--take place off-center. Examples of these include remodeling community centers, building baseball dugouts for local schools, and constructing scaffolding for community festivals.

Students typically start work on a VST project soon after they join the vocational class and have completed safety training. Students with different levels of skills in a trade work on different parts of the project. A less advanced student may be assigned to work with a more advanced student or to a less technically-demanding task. Many VST projects involve students from different vocational trades. This provides the students with experience in coordinating their work with people from other trades-- an important skill for construction workers.

Each center prepares an annual plan for VST projects and submits the plan to its regional office for review. The annual VST plan describes the projects the center proposes to conduct in the year, the expected costs of the projects, the expected amount of training it will provide students in each trade, and the expected dollar value of the project.² The national office provides guidelines on how

²Projects that cost less than \$2,500 can be grouped together under a “miscellaneous” category
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the centers should select projects (DOL 1993, PRH-4, page 13). The first priority is that the project provide training for the skills required for each vocational trade. The second priority is that the projects carry-out on-center construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of the center.

Specifically designated VST funds cover most of the costs of VST projects including material costs, equipment rental, and subcontracted services. The center may also request capital construction/rehabilitation funds when the costs of the projects greatly exceed the amount of VST funds available. An outside agency typically pays most of the material and equipment costs of off-center VST projects.

2. WE Projects

The goal of the WE program is “to provide students an opportunity to perform in a real work setting where they will be able to utilize and enhance their skills in their respective training areas” (DOL 1993, PRH-4, page 26). WE projects or assignments are arranged with staff on-center or with public- or private-sector employers in the local community. They are primarily for students in trades other than the construction trades, but in some centers, building and apartment maintenance (BAM) students participate in WE assignments. On-center assignments may include working in the center’s cafeteria, health clinic, or administrative offices. Off-center WE assignments may include working as a nursing aide in a local nursing home, working as a receptionist at a local private company, or working in a local auto repair shop.

To be assigned to a WE project, students must have completed or nearly completed a level of their vocational training in the trade. They are often interviewed by the prospective “employer” before the assignment. Usually only one or two students work at the assignment at one time. Job

²(...continued)
in the plan.

Corps limits the amount of time the students can work at a WE assignment to 30 working days. Students are usually not paid for their work.

At the time of this study, centers were beginning to develop school-to-work (STW) projects where students work in the community earlier in their vocational training. Because STW projects comprised fewer than 3 percent of projects and were similar to WE projects in many respects, we treated them as WE projects in this study.

B. ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The second chapter of this report outlines the methodology we used to estimate the value of the output of work projects, including a description of the sampling of the projects and the approaches we used to estimate the value of the projects. The third chapter presents the findings from the study and discusses the sensitivity of the results to alternative assumptions. Appendix A discusses the weights used in the analysis, Appendix B describes each project studied in detail, and Appendix C presents the standard errors of our estimates.

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